



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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## Traditions Abound in the State Capitol

*By State Rep. Don Vruwink*

As I finish my first year in the Wisconsin Assembly, I can hardly believe 2017 is almost over. The legislative session started on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, inauguration day. After I took the oath of office, I signed my name in a book of signatures that dates back to 1923. The Assembly is now on the second edition of the book of names of legislators whose footsteps I follow. It is a very humbling experience.

Traditions abound in the Capitol. One of them is to give special attention to a legislator's first speech during floor debate. A maiden speech is the only time applause is allowed in the chamber. At the conclusion of the speech, all 99 members of the Assembly or 33 members of the Senate applaud and shake the freshman legislator's hand, regardless of the content of the speech.

My maiden speech was on a bill relating to regulating the use of the groundwater that we all share. I was advised not to talk too long, but the teacher in me made my 14-minute speech seem short to me and probably too long for some listeners. My first speech was an experience I will forever cherish.

Two other traditions at the Capitol are the Christmas tree and the *Wisconsin Blue Book*. This year's Christmas tree is a balsam fir that was donated by a landowner in the Town of Emery in Price County in northwestern Wisconsin. The tree is centered on the ground floor of the Capitol rotunda and its tip reaches far above the first floor rotunda railing.

The tree is decorated with ornaments made by schoolchildren across Wisconsin. The 2017 ornament theme is the centennial of construction of the Capitol building, which was completed in 1917. Not every student stuck to the theme. The decorations vary widely, including ornaments that are school mascots, cupcakes, and sleds. A toy train on loan from Wisconsin and Southern Railroad circles the tree continuously.

Just as people look forward to the arrival of the Christmas tree every year, legislators and the public look forward to the publication of the *Wisconsin Blue Book* every two years. The first *Blue Book*, printed in 1853, was a pocket-sized reference guide for legislators. It has since expanded in size, scope, and purpose and is available free to the public.

The *Blue Book* is an introduction to Wisconsin government. It contains biographies of legislators, members of Congress, Supreme Court justices, and other elected officials. It provides descriptions of

state agencies; information on counties, cities, towns and villages; vote tallies for state and federal elections; and much more.

The 2015-16 *Blue Book* was a bulky 1,000 pages. The current Blue Book is a slimmer model at 677 pages. Every modern *Blue Book* has a featured story. Some recent features have been “Wisconsin in the Civil War” and “The Wisconsin Historical Society: Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories Since 1846.”

This year’s feature is “Knocking on the Door: Women in the Wisconsin Legislature.” The *Blue Book* writers met with 43 current and former female legislators to learn about their experiences and what brought them into public service. It is a fascinating essay and I hope you take the time to read it.

Since taking office I have delivered *Blue Books* to libraries and government offices in Whitewater, Milton, Edgerton, Footville, and Oregon, among other locations. If you would like a 2017-2018 *Blue Book* or a tour of the Capitol, please let me know. My contact information is below.

*Rep. Don Vruwink represents the 43<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District, which includes parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson and Dane counties. He can be reached at [Rep.Vruwink@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Rep.Vruwink@legis.wi.gov) and at 608-266-3790. The mailing address is P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708.*

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